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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the thesis that there has been a return to the definition of citizenship forwarded by educational reformers of the 1890s that characterizes much of the reform efforts of the 1990s. The paper examines the current debate about school reform in light of the citizenship education debate of the 1890s that saw the emergence of the field of social studies with citizenship as a cornerstone. The document returns to the 1893 Committee of Ten's national report, "Conference on History, Civil Government and Political Economy," and compares this and subsequent reports to the curricular reports of the last two decades. The paper suggests the emphasis on subject-centered social studies may have a splintering effect as historians and geographers lose sight of the core of citizenship education and thus lose the opportunity to effect dynamic educational reform with a truly democratic citizenship agenda. Contains 20 references. (EH)

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Past, Present and Future:

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by

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Past, Present and Future:
Challenges to the Social Studies

School reform efforts in the 1990's have adopted the re-emergence of a 100 year old debate regarding the academic preparation of democratic citizens. For 75 years the field of social studies has reigned supreme in its educational and curricular role as the leader of citizenship education. However, the 1990's has seen increased momentum towards efforts to dismantle the field of social studies and re-establish history as the curriculum cornerstone of citizenship education. At the heart of this debate about school reform is the concept of citizenship, and the place of history education in contributing to the education of a democratic citizen.

For over 100 years American education has seen numerous models of citizenship education developed to serve both curricular and political needs. As schools have undergone periodic reforms, so too have changing conceptions of citizenship manifested themselves within schools and their missions. Initial efforts at standardizing school curricula focusing upon citizenship education occurred on a national level in the 1890's, and were led by the National Education Association. The number of released national reports, starting with the Committee of Ten's *Conference on History, Civil Government and Political Economy* (hereafter Committee of Ten) in 1893 to the end of World War I was consistent as no less than five reports were issued. This period of frenzied reform activity has, however, been surpassed in the last 15 years. Starting with the 1983 release of the *National Council for the Social Studies Task Force on Scope and Sequence*, this most recent 15 year span has seen the release of no less than eight separate national curriculum reform reports directed to improving citizenship education in schools. A large number of individual state curriculum reports have also been developed in the 1990's intending to reform citizenship education.

The constant issuing of curriculum reform reports is a reality of education. Ignored shelves in libraries, often frequented only by curious graduate students, are filled with reform reports released with fanfare and promise which in short order were catalogued to

gather dust next to the previous parade of reform reports. To summarily dismiss all past curriculum reports as a utopian, and ultimately unsuccessful, is at the peril for anyone seeking insight into the ideas and motivation of the developers of each past, and ultimately present, curriculum report.

Because the pace of present citizenship reform efforts continues unabated, it is to an historical review of these past curriculum reform efforts that one may turn for perspective into recent reports. Whether the curriculum report had history, geography, a social science, or social studies as its central curricular focus, each report held a view of citizenship which reflected beliefs commonly held by those issuing the respective report. This paper presents the thesis that there has been a return to the definition of citizenship forwarded by educational reformers of the 1890's which characterizes much of the reform efforts of the 1990's.

Definitions of Citizenship

The Committee of Ten formally established history as the primary vehicle for citizenship education in schools. The report modestly declared itself to be "the most important educational document ever issued in the United States" (p. III) .

Given the composition of the membership of the Committee of Ten, the almost 100 individual members of the nine committees were comprised entirely of white males, the report's recommendations were hardly surprising. Each member was approaching the zenith of their respective educational careers. A review of membership shows most were either professors in higher education, headmasters from select private schools, or principals from established urban high schools. At the time of the report's release, less than three of the members lived west of the Mississippi River. It is little surprise then that the document reflected an eastern vision of an orderly, logical, society which could be taught to students through an historical examination of the institutions and events which culminated in present society.

Simply, the report conceived of a good citizen as someone knowledgeable of the history of the institutions, values and beliefs of the dominant society of which the members themselves had risen to positions of power and respect. The model of citizenship forwarded by this document was one of cultural transmission, including a fixed body of historical knowledge to be garnered from historical instruction. The report stated that "the minds of young children be stored with some of the elementary facts and principles of their subjects which the adult student will surely need" (p. 16) The document intended to serve as a device to ensure the extension of a common core of historical knowledge which was then to be passed on to the next generation.

The report states that "History has long been commended as a part of the education of a good citizen." (p. 169). That vision of a good citizen was intended to include the history of America as the document states "we Americans know our country is great, better than we know why it is great."(p. 169) Therefore history was to serve to inculcate youth to accept the values of a common national vision, come to share those values and work to preserve them. It was hoped through a systematic study of history students would come to understand how and why this shared vision of nationalism came to be formed as well as understand it was for the betterment of all in society to both accept and support those values.

The centrality of historical knowledge to citizenship education was reaffirmed in the 1899 report of the Committee of Seven, *The Study of History in Schools*, issued by the American Historical Association. The report stated that history was unique in its ability to provide students with "some sense of the duties of citizenship." (p. 1) Tinkering with the curriculum program forwarded by the Committee of Ten, the Committee of Seven argued that the past had unique insights to offer democratic citizens, and therefore history need not only have a present, immediate application to be of value to a democratic society.

What these two committees had affirmed was that it was history, for all its unique insights and perspectives on the progress of

human development, that would be of most value to a democratic citizen.

Enter the social sciences

As the twentieth Century dawned, and moving along parallel, but not yet intersecting tracks, the social sciences were poised to challenge history's claim of uniqueness in the education of citizens. Social scientists held history, due to epistemological and methodological constraints, was unable to address the present problems facing society. To that end, the social scientists, led by the emerging fields of sociology and political science, "viewed the school curriculum as fertile ground" ("Birth of the NCSS", p. 394). With the social sciences gaining in legitimacy, citizenship education began to assume a greater place in the study of existing social problems. If history could contribute to that understanding, it was to be included. If history insisted on concentrating only in the past, it was to move aside for disciplines trained to address society's immediate needs.

The social sciences made only modest gains in the school curriculum for the first decade of the new century. It was not until the National Education Association convened the Commission for the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE), in 1912, that the social sciences seriously challenged history as the central curriculum discipline to educate democratic citizens.

In 1912 Thomas Jesse Jones, a Columbia University Ph.D. graduate in sociology, and an instructor in social studies at the Hampton Institute, was tapped to be the chair of the Committee on Social Science. Likely it was Jones that changed the name from social science to social studies. It would be quickly evident that this committee was set to propose a radical new method of educating democratic citizens (Correia).

With Jones, and others that shared his vision of citizenship, leading the newly christened Committee on Social Studies, it is little wonder that present needs, and not historical perspective, became accepted as the primary focus of citizenship education. That is, with

the social, political and economic challenges created by immigration and industrial development, educational leaders of this era felt compelled to address these problems immediately. History was still to have a place in citizenship education, but its role at the core of citizenship curriculum was forever altered (Saxe).

Social efficiency was the concept guiding the vision of democratic education forwarded by the CRSE. Education for a student to assume a personally rewarding, and socially responsible position in life was how the CRSE reformers understood social efficiency. The wants and needs of the individual were always to be weighed against the greater needs of society. The report of the CRSE resulted in the comprehensive high school which still dominates the nation's landscape today. Student needs, and success, were no longer interpreted in strictly academic terms.

Accompanying this acceptance of the social sciences, in the form of the social studies in the school curriculum, was a redefinition of democratic citizenship. These educational leaders in the CRSE held that individual needs were not universal, and were by definition, unique to each citizen. This notion was slowly supplanting the existing concept of a rigid standard of citizenship which was defined in strictly academic terms. Higher education, rightly or wrongly, came to be viewed as the purview of the elite, and the comprehensive high school was developed to assume the education of democratic citizens.

The combination of changing social demographics in the United States and the rise of the social sciences in academia translated to both a conception and practice of democratic citizenship which was more fluid than those held in the past. Whereas previously citizenship education was understood within a rigid conception of academic success and mastery of subject matter, those recommendations forwarded by the CRSE were intended to prepare students to function as contributing members of society.

The report issued by the CRSE in 1918, *Cardinal Principals of Education*, stated that a true Democratic education "should develop in each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits, and powers" (p. 9) to benefit both the individual and the society in which they

were to live. Therefore, while academics would contribute to citizenship education, it would not be the only vehicle to define a proper democratic education.

The composition of members of the CRSE and its various subcommittees reflected a new age of educational thinker. The CRSE indeed was a reflection of the emerging, college educated professional of the 1910's. All of the members attended colleges east of the Mississippi River. In short, while not departing radically from the demographic composition of the Committee of Ten, intellectually this group represented a distinctive change in philosophical orientation from the earlier report. These members were educational professionals. They brought with them the recent educational and psychological findings to guide their thinking of how schools in general, and democratic citizenship in particular, should be developed and implemented in schools.

The social studies as a curricular field gained nation-wide acceptance due to the efforts of the CRSE. No longer would history have a unique claim to democratic citizenship education. Just as nature studies become the organizing theme for the natural sciences, the social studies became the curriculum method to orient democratic citizenship education to the study of society.

Professional historians did not abandon the schools totally with the release of the CRSE report. However, given the rise of the professional educator, the field of social studies became the filter through which historians were relegated to pass in order to exert any noted influence upon schools. The social studies place of dominance in the academic preparation of democratic citizens was reaffirmed in the 1930's with the work of the Commission on the Social Studies. Representing the legitimacy of the social sciences, historians contributed, but did not dominate, this committee's work. The result of the Commissions' work was a multi-volumed set of publications culminating in the 1934 *Conclusions and Recommendations*.

Affirming the centrality of the social studies, and not either the social sciences nor history, the view of democratic citizenship forwarded by the Commission was hardly surprising. Academic success as defined by rigid areas of discipline organization and a set

body of knowledge, as defined by both the Committee of Ten and Committee of Seven, were absent.

The Commission wrote that the purpose of democratic citizenship education was to ensure that students had the "knowledge of realities and capacity to cooperate (which) are indispensable to the development and even perdurance of American society"(p. 35). Explicitly the report cited as dangerous any "continued emphasis in education on the traditional ideas and values of economic individualism," which if left unchecked in schools would result in "conflicts, contradictions, maladjustment's, and perils" (p. 35).

Professional historians slow retreat from involvement in schools, which in reality began before the start of World War I, was abated briefly with the Commission's efforts. However, as Novick notes, "(H)istorians, on the whole, ignored" the report. (p. 190) With professional educators left free to fashion schools as they saw fit, the vision of democratic citizenship held by these leaders was unchecked in schools.

Occasional challenges to the social, non-academic definition of democratic citizenship did indeed occur. The cases of challenges to the textbooks of Harold Rugg, or the 1950's efforts of Arthur Bestor, did for a short time catch the attention of the public. However, as soon as the work of these special interest groups dissipated, social studies leaders once again found themselves responsible for the education of democratic citizens, and the social studies remained the curricular vehicle of choice.

Full Circle

"It is a matter of basic civil rights," National Education Association president Bob Chase stated in a 1997 article in *The Christian Science Monitor* regarding his support for academic standards. Yet another permutation of democratic citizenship has manifested itself with the 1990's debate over national academic standards. In the past democratic citizenship was, in the case of the use of history in schools, a mastery of subject-matter on which to

rely for sound judgment. Social studies was borne of the perceived need to educate students to function within present society and to contribute to the betterment of society. This new variety of democratic citizenship continues in the tradition of democratic citizenship by associating a sound academic background with a "basic civil right."

For the last century the use of citizenship to legitimize academic reform has been a constant theme in our nation's schools. In the 1990's a new call for democratic citizenship education has emerged. Those advocating this position have, in a skillful use of higher academic standards as a necessary component of basic civil rights, have successfully melded the seemingly incompatible concepts of individual need with specific, prescribed, discipline-based instruction. In the past individual need meant schools were to provide courses to meet the wide variety of academic and vocational tracks a students was likely to follow later in life. In the 1990's these perceptions and interpretations of individual needs have narrowed, as was the case in the 1890's, to mean a stringent, narrow academic program that all are expected to master.

As historians rediscovered the nation's schools in the late 1980's the language of citizenship was resurrected to pave the way for public acceptance of discipline-based, academic reform. As has been the case in almost all educational reform movements, the impetus for change in citizenship education in general, and history-based instruction specifically, was from outside the classroom and not led by classroom teachers.

It was with the release of the 1987 Bradley Commission on History in the Schools report *Building a History Curriculum* that historians seriously challenged the then 60 year old notion that social studies was the most viable method to educate citizens. The report stated, in arguing that history deserved a central place in the curriculum, that "the knowledge and habits of mind to be gained from the study of history are indispensable to the education of citizens in a democracy" (p.7). Citizenship required a mastery of knowledge of United States History, and any compromise regarding subject-matter competence was to be at the peril of the individual

and the society in which they were to function. Through history, a background of material could be considered prior to any decision-making. As was the case nearly 100 years before, democratic citizenship in the late 1980's was being defined in a specific, academic sense of information necessary to be able to function as a citizen.

On the heals of the Bradley Commission's report, the National Endowment for the Humanities funded the National Center for History in the Schools(hereafter Center). It was the Center which spearheaded the development of the controversial *National History Standards*. No matter the result of this groups efforts, it was how the Center chose to define citizenship, and the role of historical knowledge in that definition, that make its efforts distinctive.

Reversing a 60 year trend is never an easy effort, and the intransigence to change in public schools is a tall order for any reform movement. As Tyack and Cuban note, "teachers tend to be allergic to utopian claims for reform", and "are often the people blamed when grandiose innovations fail" (p. 132). The Bradley Commission was sensitive to this fear and did state that the classroom teacher was to be a "equal partner" in the process of reform. In reality, both the Center and the Bradley Commission were special interest groups drawing their financial and intellectual support from sources other than teachers.

The debacle of the release of the two separate standards documents by the Center reveals just how little agreement among historians and the public actually exists relative to a common understanding of United States History. Whether naive or foolhardy, the Center's reform efforts have met with very mixed success. The Center chose to be specific in its curricular recommendations, and as such alienated significant , and politically powerful, portions of the citizenry. However, based upon its fixed notion of democratic citizenship, the report could hardly have issued anything different. That is, by choosing to make specific historical knowledge a prerequisite for competent, democratic citizenship, it was natural that not all of history, and not all of the special interest groups, could

be included. By not including all of the history of the country, the group revealed a fatal flaw of the historian; namely choice. Therefore, despite the Center's leadership claims of a merging of the interests of educators and the professional community of historians, (*History on Trial*, p. 113-114) in reality there had never been a true grass roots efforts to garner substantive support for history reform.

No such ground swell of national consensus exists for changing the practice of democratic citizenship education. Despite claims of high academic standards being a basic civil right, national consensus has failed to gather the requisite national support. With teachers considered to be at the very least suspect, and often the cause of the problem of poor history instruction, teacher are not going to be the source for substantive curricular reform of citizenship education. If the National Center for History in the Schools hopes to implement their sweeping changes in schools, teachers must be included in the process. Currently the National Council for the Social Studies serves the interests of these citizenship teachers, and has done so for over 75 years. Upstart reform organizations, no matter what national figures lead them or how well funded, if seeking to radically alter educational practices, are likely to find schools unreceptive to proposals for substantive change.

Disjointed momentum

Through habit, convenience, or tradition, the social studies was unchallenged as the curriculum of choice for citizenship education as the 1990's began. The momentum which had previously served to keep separate subject areas under the social studies curriculum umbrella began to shift in earnest in 1993. That year saw serious efforts undertaken to develop separate subject area standards. Since 1993 at least five academic discipline area subject reports have been issued by their respective organizations. These reports are; *Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics*; *National Standards for Civics and Government*; *National Standards for History*; *National Geography Standards*; and *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. Each of these reports included input from the National

Council for the Social Studies reluctantly, if at all. These individual areas each understand their respective subject area to be unique in what it has to contribute to citizenship education. Therefore, a serious competition has begun as regards to space in the curriculum, leadership in the field of citizenship education, and a willingness to compromise individual subject matter competence to the greater goal of citizenship education.

The initial attempt by the NCSS to respond to its most recent critics was the 1989 Commission on Social Studies. The report *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century* was released, yet has had a negligible impact upon either schools or teaching. The commission even had the funding to publish *Making Sense of Social Studies*, by David Jenness. Unfortunately, the book did anything else but live up to its title. Following a spirited debate on the pages of NCSS sponsored publications, the report currently exists only as a curious relic.

In 1994 the NCSS released *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. This document was intended, in part to keep the NCSS as a player in the standards game. That is, the NCSS found itself on the outside looking in at a spirited national debate about curricular reform. In reality, these two NCSS sponsored reports have increased the momentum by which social studies is perceived as having little, if any, curricular cohesion and identity.

Marginalization of the NCSS has been an unfortunate side-effect of these two reports. Never has the NCSS issued a formal statement relative to the relationship of these two most recent curriculum reports. Into the perception of a void in citizenship education has come special interest subject matter groups intent on claiming their rightful place in the school curriculum. National academic standards proposed by the White House still do not include ANY mention of social studies.

Because the NCSS has always sought to be an inclusive group, it has continuously been accused of being without direction. As the individual groups splinter away, the confederation of subjects which had agreed in principle to fall under the social studies umbrella is

unraveling. Whether the group is the Joint Council for Economic Education or the National Center for History in Schools, the challenge to the NCSS is the same. Support is no longer to be assumed to be forthcoming from academic and professional organizations.

At the very least the social studies has served as a convenient area of teacher certification. Financially strapped school districts have been able to use social studies teachers to teach a variety of subject areas under the social studies banner. As each subject area was understood to contribute to the education of a democratic citizen, specific subject matter competence was not the driving force behind each individual course. As separate subject matter areas jockey for control of the curriculum, it is possible individual subject area teacher certification will ultimately replace the certification option labeled as social studies.

As demands from individual subject areas "trickle up" to teacher training programs, programs will not be able to provide adequate course background training in a reasonable time frame. Therefore, social studies (be in a Broad Field of Comprehensive format) will not remain a certification option. The likely result is that financially stable school districts will build departments of content specialists, and smaller, rural cash-strapped districts will reduce their number of course offerings.

The NCSS serves many masters, and this has always been the field's strength, although many see this is a weakness. However, as special interest groups attempt to direct citizenship education by demanding specific inclusion superior to that of the overall goal of citizenship education, the field is at peril.

Luckily for the social studies, no ground swell of national consensus truly exists for changing the practice of democratic citizenship education in schools. Despite claims of high academic standards being a basic civil right, national consensus has failed to gather the requisite national support. With teachers considered to be at the very least suspect, and often the cause of the problem of poor history instruction, teachers are not going to be the source for substantive curricular reform of citizenship education. If, for example, the National Center for History in the Schools hope to

implement their sweeping changes in schools, teachers must be included in the process. Currently the National Council for the Social Studies serves the interests of these citizenship teachers, and has done so for over 75 years. Upstart reform organizations, no matter what national figures lead them or how well funded, if seeking to radically alter educational practices, are likely to find schools unreceptive to proposals for substantive change.

Conclusions

For disciplines based on the understanding of the past, history and social science education curriculum reformers have proven themselves woefully ignorant of the limited successes of past educational reform efforts, and of the methods by which educators are prepared to teach in the 1990's. If this ignorance of modern teacher preparation is by design, these reformers are communicating loudly their contempt for teacher education. If this ignorance is by oversight, one must question the qualifications of these reformers to fashion any sort of change in an arena of which they have little understanding. In either case, as Tyack and Cuban argue, little substantive reform will emerge from any effort which does not consciously and actively include the teaching profession.

Social studies sees as its central purpose the education of democratic citizens. Whereas historians and social scientists see their field as providing a convenient by-product of information for citizens in a democracy, social studies sees history as contributing to the overall education of citizenry, along with the social sciences.

The distinction is noteworthy. Given the erratic track record of academic professionals in working with the teachers in the nation's schools, nearly seventy five years of neglect exists. Into the void of citizen education, has stepped the National Council for the Social Studies. As a consistent presence in schools, the NCSS has served to respect the tradition of local control, broadly define citizenship to allow teachers to meet local needs, and attempt to reconcile the interests of competing groups. As an inclusive group, the NCSS has come well short of meeting the needs of all its constituent groups. What the NCSS has managed to do, however, is

serve democratic citizenship education by defining it broadly and inclusively, including teachers in its efforts, and remaining an organization dedicated to the education of democratic citizens.

Until advocates of specific discipline based instruction can build and maintain professional support networks for teachers, it is unlikely that they will be successful in substantively altering instruction of ANY subject matter in schools. The threat to the field of social studies, however, is still evident as long as these special interest groups continue to operate in opposition to the inclusive nature of citizenship education as conceived by social studies and practiced by the NCSS.

The insistence of a rigid conception of democratic citizenship as has re-emerged in recent efforts at school reform, will probably splinter support and preclude a national consensus of support for these special interest groups advocating reform in the school curriculum. For example, as the true nature of history, and the very political nature of it became evident, history reformers recently turned on themselves and likely squandered a significant opportunity to affect change in schools.

Presently that consensus which has served the NCSS and citizenship education is in a precarious situation. The NCSS's formal responses to 1990's challenges of legitimacy have been in the form of curriculum standards reports. These reports have only resulted in increased confusion among the very groups the NCSS has sought to serve. If the NCSS intends to further the cause of citizenship education, it should actively support reform efforts which reflect a dynamic view of democratic citizenship and are inclusive for all groups so interested. The future of social studies is to be found in encouraging and valuing input from a wide variety of interested groups and developing curricula intended to educate democratic citizens.

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